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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 08/09/07-2

Index:

Defense and security affairs:

11) Defense Minister Koike in Washington meeting with Defense
Secretary Gates transmits Japan's intention to continue MSDF service

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in the Indian Ocean

12) Government to beef up counterintelligence functions to protect
against spy activities targeting Japan

13) New Komeito pressure forces LDP to shelve efforts to change
constitutional interpretation banning use of right of collective
self-defense

14) Collective self-defense will not be on the Diet docket this fall

Announcement of South-North Korea summit:

15) With surprise announcement of South-North Korea summit,
government alarmed that Japan's issue with the North will be even
more pushed into background

16) South Korea joins conciliatory trend with North Korea, leaving
Japan farther behind the six-party pack and Prime Minister Abe
facing policy dilemma

Political agenda:

17) Anti-Abe forces forming a group in the LDP

18) Some in ruling camp pushing for a delay in Diet opening, now set
for Aug. 31

Articleless:

11) Japan-US defense summit: Japanese defense minister conveys intention to continue MSDF refueling operations in Indian Ocean

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
August 9, 2007

Takashi Arimoto, Washington

Visiting Japanese Defense Minister Yuriko Koike yesterday met with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates at the Defense Department. In the

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session, Koike conveyed to Gates Japan's plan to extend the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law in order to continue the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling operations in the Indian Ocean, saying: "We'd like to fulfill a role expected from Japan in the war on terror." In response, Gates told Koike: "We've highly appreciated Japan's active contributions in the war on terror."

Koike also referred to the selection of the next-generation fighter plane (FX) and said: "Given the drastically changing situation in East Asia, I think it is necessary to secure quality over quantity."

After the meeting, Koike criticized the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa for his opposition to extending the law this way: "Mr. Ozawa's way of thinking is the same as at the time of the Gulf War. He has failed to catch up with the times."

12) Gov't to step up counterintelligence

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)
August 9, 2007

TOKYO 00003639 002 OF 005

The government has worked out a plan to step up its counterintelligence against foreign spies. The plan is intended to protect classified information about national security mainly in the area of diplomacy and defense. Such confidential information will be placed under the government's special control. For that purpose, the government plans to launch a new section under the Cabinet Secretariat next fiscal year. In addition, the government is also

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planning to introduce a system that will examine and confirm qualifications for access to classified information. The newly planned body is to control the government's classified information to prevent its leakage.

The government will hold a meeting of its counterintelligence promotion panel today to approve, with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Junzo Matoba presiding. In the meeting, the panel is

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expected to approve the government's planned basic course of action for counterintelligence.

The government is going to flesh out the plan with specific measures. After that, the government will implement these measures in stages, with the first stage scheduled for April next year and the second stage for April 2009. The Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (CIRO) will set up a "counterintelligence center" to control classified information.

13) New Komeito clearly opposed to modifying constitutional interpretation to allow collective defense

ASAHI (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)
August 9, 2007

It has now become difficult to make changes to the government's interpretation of the Constitution to allow the country to exercise

the right to collective self-defense, a priority for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The blue-ribbon panel established by Abe to study the collective defense right still plans to produce a set of proposals this fall urging the government to open the door to collective defense. Meanwhile, New Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa yesterday voiced his party's opposition to altering the government's constitutional interpretation. In addition, with the reversal of the positions of the ruling and opposition parties in the House of Councillors, even amending laws, such as the Self-Defense Force Law, has now become difficult.

Kitagawa said in a press conference: "We are against altering the interpretation in the first place. Besides, the Upper House is now controlled by the opposition camp, so modifying the interpretation is not possible." He thus voiced opposition and pointed to difficulty in improving laws, as well.

Abe has ordered the panel to study whether Japan can exercise the collective defense right in several scenarios, including a US naval vessel being attacked on the high seas. In responding to a question at the Diet in May, Abe said: "In the event the SDF take action based on (the government's new interpretation of the Constitution), a law would naturally be necessary."

According to debate in the Liberal Democratic Party and the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, opening the door to collective defense would require an additional clause to the SDF Law allowing the SDF to intercept US-bound missiles, in addition to a new law specifying a set of conditions and procedures for exercising the collective

TOKYO 00003639 003 OF 005

defense right.

But the New Komeito is opposing it and chances are slim for the Democratic Party of Japan to cooperate in improving the law for collective defense. Although some government officials think that the prime minister's Diet reply is sufficient for changing the constitutional interpretation, this approach is certain to draw fire from within the ruling bloc as rough and hasty.

14) Extraordinary Diet session likely to be postponed until September

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)
August 9, 2007

The government and ruling parties decided yesterday to give up on the idea of convening the fall extraordinary Diet session before the end of the month. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe originally considered shuffling his cabinet on August 27 and opening the extraordinary Diet session on August 31. But he has decided to postpone the plan in consideration of the ruling bloc's opinion that cabinet ministers would need more time for making preparations. Coordination is underway to convene the session in mid-September in part to secure enough time for deliberations on the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law scheduled to expire on November 1 -- a highlight in the next Diet session.

Some government officials revealed this yesterday. Abe plans to shuffle his cabinet on August 27, as planned.

15) Government worried Japan may be isolated in six-party talks, with two Koreas summit

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
August 9, 2007

The announcement by South Korea of a planned meeting between the leaders of South and North Korea has sparked concern in the Japanese government that if the two Koreas placed priority on their bilateral dialogue over the six-party talks, Japan might be removed from the (six-party) framework of addressing issues related to Pyongyang.

It will be the second summit between the two Koreas, following the one in June 2000. Officials in the government and the ruling camp outwardly welcome the news of the Koreas summit, with Liberal

Democratic Party Secretary General Nakagawa saying: "I hope the summit will help accelerate the process of resolving the issue of Pyongyang's abductions of Japanese nationals and denuclearizing North Korea." In their hearts, though, they fear the summit will have an adverse effect on ongoing international efforts to bring about the North's denuclearization, with one government source remarking: "In an attempt to achieve some 'results,' prior to the presidential election in December by meeting with the North Korean leader, South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun might make excessive concessions, such as promising to offer large-scale economic assistance to Pyongyang, while downplaying North Korea's nuclear-development issue."

Concerning the abduction issue, Prime Minister Abe said last night: "The issue is extremely important for Japan, so we must resolve it without fail. I will convey Japan's strong intention and view to the South Korean government and seek its understanding."

TOKYO 00003639 004 OF 005

16) Other countries taking conciliatory approach to North Korea while leaving Japan out of loop; Prime minister also being tested over abduction issue

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)
August 9, 2007

Prime Minister Abe outwardly welcomed the announcement of a planned North-South Korea summit yesterday, saying: "I hope (the meeting) will help ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula." But recent moves by the United States and South Korea eager to hold talks with the North show their willingness to take a conciliatory approach toward Pyongyang while leaving Japan out of the loop. In addition to the Liberal Democratic Party's crushing defeat in the July House of Councillors election, the issue of Pyongyang's abductions of Japanese nationals is now facing the prime minister as a major challenge.

In June, US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, top US negotiator for the six-party talks, made a surprise visit to North Korea. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi also visited Pyongyang last month and met North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. This time, North and South Korea agreed to hold a summit.

As it stands, North Korea has actively made a diplomatic approach separately to countries involved in the six-party talks. This strategy is apparently aimed at isolating Japan in the six-party talks, displeasing the Japanese government. In response to Hill's visit to North Korea, Foreign Minister Taro Aso commented: "We don't want the US to easily make a concession."

Japan and North Korea have agreed to hold a bilateral working group meeting under the framework of the six-party talks later this month. Now that the US aims to implement the "next stage" by the end of this year, following North Korea's denuclearization, Japan wants to find a way to settle the issue of Pyongyang's abductions of Japanese nationals. The Foreign Ministry has expectations of the next working-group meeting, a senior official saying: "I do not think that North Korea will insist the abduction issue has already resolved." But nobody knows what move North Korea will make in the meeting."

17) Cross-factional anti-Abe group to be launched within month

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Slightly abridged)
August 9, 2007

LDP lawmakers belonging to the Tsushima, Yamasaki and Tanigaki factions yesterday held a meeting in Tokyo and decided to launch a cross-factional study group from a standpoint critical of the Abe administration's policy. The members of the envisaged group will include former Education Minister Kenji Kosaka, who openly criticized Abe for remaining in office despite the crushing defeat suffered by the ruling camp in the Upper House election. There is a possibility of this group attracting LDP members critical of the prime minister.

The meeting brought together Kosaka, Lower House members Asahiko Mihara and Masazumi Gotoda from the Tsushima faction, Lower House member Kisaburo Tokai from the Yamasaki faction, and Lower House members Hiroyuki Sonoda and Koichi Yamamoto from the Tanigaki

TOKYO 00003639 005 OF 005

faction. Former Home Affairs Minister Takeshi Noda is also expected to join from the Yamasaki faction. Participants of the meeting sounded out former State Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Kaoru Yosano, who does not belong to any faction, about the possibility of his joining the group. However, in response to an interview by the Mainichi Shimbun, Yosano noted, "I will not join any move that has anything to do with a Lower House dissolution and snap election." The seven will hold a preparatory meeting for the establishment of the envisaged group within the month and launch it, after naming it. They said they will widely recruit participants from within the party.

Many participants in the meeting yesterday criticized Abe, with one noting, "The prime minister has rejected changing the basic policy, insisting that the basic policy is supported, but he has pursued no policy discussion." A consensus was reached that the group would propose revising the excessive market principles adopted under the Koizumi reform policy, as Sonoda put it.

No cabinet ministers have been picked from these three factions with the exception of Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Policy Akira Amari, who was given the post in reward for supporting Abe in the LDP presidential election last year. These factions are maintaining their distance from the administration. Kosaka called on the prime minister to step down during the LDP lawmakers' meeting on the 7th.

18) Arguments calling for putting off convening extraordinary Diet session on Aug. 31 spreading in ruling parties

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 9, 2007

Opinions calling for putting off convening the full-fledged fall extraordinary Diet session on Aug. 31 are gaining ground. The coordination of the schedule with Aug. 31 in mind is already underway at the wishes of the Prime Minister's Office (Kantei). However, some have pointed out that there would not be enough time to prepare Diet replies since a Cabinet reshuffle is to take place on Aug. 27. An increasing number of LDP and New Komeito members are also insisting that since the opposition camp has gained control the Upper House, the ruling camp must carefully prepare Diet replies.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wants to convene the next extraordinary Diet session as soon as possible in order to ensure passage of an amendment bill intended to extend the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law.

One senior member of the LDP Diet Policy Committee yesterday said, "Nothing has been decided about the date of convening the extraordinary Diet session." Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki will today confer on the Diet schedule with Tetsuro Yano, chairman of the LDP Upper House Diet Policy Committee.

A plan to put off the date of convening the extraordinary Diet session until mid-September, when the prime minister will have been back from his trip to Australia to attend the APEC summit to be held in Sydney, has also been floated.

SCHIEFFER